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ABSTRACT

An overview of the general education programs in higher education is presented and six curricular patterns are discussed. The distribution model requires students to generalize their fields of knowledge to some extent and acquaints students with various modes of discourse. Integrative models aim to draw upon the knowledge and methodological approaches of several disciplines in dealing with a common problem, theme, or period. Values models are based on the notion that value clarification and formation are necessary for holistic living and responsible career pursuits. Student-based models focus on practices such as independent study, small group meetings, peer-group teaching and experiential learning. Competency-based models place emphasis on educational outcomes rather than the experiences that comprise curriculum. The career focus model combines work with study toward a goal of career development. Examples of each are cited, and it is noted that each reflects the mission, student body, and needs of the institution. (PHR)

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EMERGING PATTERNS IN GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULA

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One of the major points of concern in contemporary American higher education is the reform of general education. Throughout the country various colleges and universities are appointing curriculum committees, or general education task forces, for the purpose of designing new program models. All too frequently, persons appointed to these committees are faculty members and administrators whose training or daily responsibilities have not allowed them to keep abreast with current professional discourse relative to general education. Consequently, many of these persons come to their committee assignments relatively underprepared for the informed deliberations which must take place if worthy results are to be obtained.

This underpreparedness (actually more a case of unreadiness) expresses itself in certain discernable deficiencies: (1) vagueness of understanding as to the place and purpose of general studies in the collegiate curriculum; (2) semantic confusion regarding such terms as "general studies," "liberal studies," "basic studies," and, possibly, "remedial studies"; (3) an unfamiliarity with the professional literature on general education; (4) a tendency to focus exclusively on course selection, to the neglect of non-curricular dimensions; (5) an inadequate appreciation of the importance of a conceptual framework or set of guiding principles (including the criteria by which

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particular courses will be admitted to the curriculum); and (6) a lack of knowledge regarding notable general education programs at other institutions across the nation.

The purpose of this paper is to address this last deficiency by presenting an overview of the more prominent of currently emerging curricular patterns in general education. Before launching into this discussion, however, I wish to establish a context for the use and appreciation of these program descriptions by (1) issuing a warning, (2) making an appeal, (3) making some category distinctions, and (4) indicating the informational basis of the curricular patterns.

To forestall a misuse of the program descriptions which follow below, a caveat is required. It is not the intent of this paper to present a supermarket shelf of ready-made curricular programs from which the hungry curriculum committee may choose to its own liking. Successful curricular programs do not come in pre-packaged, standardized, and replicative form. They must develop indigenously from the imagination, resourcefulness, and collective endeavors of faculty and administrators at each particular institution. On the other hand, a knowledge of promising general education programs at other institutions may have a legitimate paradigmatic function, thus contributing to curricular creativity within a generally recognized conceptual framework. The following descriptions, therefore, are presented as having an instructive and catalytic value for those curriculum committees which seek to design programs which are neither merely mimetic

nor purely novel in approach.

The appeal I wish to make follows from the above warning and also from the above cited deficiencies found in many curriculum committees. It is directed primarily toward those administrators who appoint curriculum committees and to those committee or task force chairpersons whose job it is to set forth the objectives, agendas, and completion dates of the committee's work. Specifically, I contend that such committees, after initial orientation meetings, should spend the first three or four months in learning activities designed to offset the deficiencies mentioned earlier. Such activities would appropriately include a regimen of readings from a well-chosen bibliography on general education. For example, the book General Education: Issues and Resources, prepared by the Project on General Education Models (Association of American Colleges, 1980), contains excellent bibliographies on important dimensions of general education. Other activities might include visits to other campuses, hosting visiting consultants on general education, and gathering information from employers and graduate schools relative to the strengths and weaknesses of recent graduates. Such experiences, in my view, would pay real dividends in the form of a more critical mass of understanding which, in turn, might result in genuine departures from the curriculum status quo, or, at the very least, would develop a greater appreciation of the potential of the existing curriculum.

The category distinctions referred to above pertain to

two distinct uses of the term "curricular model." On the one hand, the term may refer to a relatively high-order curricular concept from which particular courses of study would be derived in a deductive fashion. In this usage, "curricular model" means "theory of the curriculum." Several examples of such theoretical models are discussed in Eisner and Vallances's Conflicting Conceptions of Curriculum (1974). On the other hand, "curricular model" may refer to an actually existing set of courses, the collective character of which has been heavily influenced by empirical variables such as the tradition and character of the institution, the type of student body, the physical facilities available, the stability and competencies of the faculty, and departmental power politics. While the rationalistic model possesses theoretical integrity, it nevertheless is difficult to implement on an institution-wide basis. The empirical model, while having certain practical advantages, is subject to eclecticism and amorphousness. The six program approaches described below lie somewhere between these two models. They are sufficiently concrete and programmatic as to be implementable, yet they also possess a defensible degree of conceptual clarity and intelligibility. In short, while they are not without their individual limitations, they appear to be both actualizable and worthy of actualization.

The following curricular patterns are based on a study of general education programs at approximately fifty colleges and universities, including community colleges. These particular

institutions were selected for review because of their citation in the literature on general education. In the majority of cases information was obtained from campus-produced materials other than, but also including, official catalogues. An analysis of these general education programs resulted in the emergence of six curricular patterns. No claim is made that this list is an exhaustive classification of all programs in the country. Nevertheless, it would appear to be highly representative of the reforms presently taking place in general education. Furthermore, this list of six curricular patterns differs at several important points from the list devised by Bergquist (see his "Eight Curricular Models," in Developing the College Curriculum by Chickerling, et al., 1977). For example, Bergquist does not include the distributive and integrative patterns of general education curricula, despite their frequent occurrence in recently revised programs. Further, Bergquist includes a "futures-based" model even though, as he notes, there is probably no institution in the country with such a program. Finally, in addition to being governed by "innovation" as a principle of selectivity, Bergquist's models also seem to have been influenced by his desire that they constitute a complete "circle" of learning. Is this a procrustean bed?

The six curricular patterns which have resulted from this study (distribution, integration, values, student-based, competency-based, and career-focused) would appear to be sufficiently inclusive as to embrace the great majority of general education reforms

which are presently taking place in higher education. It may be observed that these models do not explicitly reflect that perennial concern of general educationists, namely, what kind of persons, skills, learning, attitudes, and values we most want to develop. There are, however, implications in this direction.

Distribution Models. The distributive curriculum is very widely used and, unfortunately, subject to mismanagement and abuse. At its best this approach guards against an illiberalized specialization of learning, provides a larger and more diversified field of knowledge, and acquaints students with the modes of discourse and evidential systems of the various disciplines. Distribution programs may be highly prescribed by course and discipline; they may require courses to be elected from approved lists by divisions of learning (humanities, social sciences, natural sciences); or they may be based on recommended, but not required, guidelines.

At Duke University, for example, students (except for those who opt for Program II, which is student-based) must distribute their courses among the three major divisions of learning and, in addition, satisfy a "fields of knowledge" requirement involving a lab course in natural science, a history of civilization course, and a course in literature or any language. Variations on the distribution plan may be found at many colleges and universities, including Boston University, Miami-Dade Community College, Illinois State University and Harvard University.

Integrative Models. The aim of the integrative curriculum is to draw upon the knowledge and methodological approaches of

several disciplines in dealing with a common problem, theme, or period. The implication is that few, if any, problems can be understood fully from a single-discipline perspective. The proponents of integrative models make use of such terms as "inter-", "intra-", "trans-", and "multidisciplinarity"; and "consummative", "capstone", or "synoptic" learning.

There are several subtypes of the integrative approach. The integrated focus on Western civilization/cultural heritage is used at a number of colleges and universities, including St. Anselm's College ("Portraits of Human Greatness"), St. John's College ("The Great Books"), Warner Pacific University ("The Culture of Western Man"), and St. Joseph's College ("Core Curriculum", a four-year reflection on man, his situation, civilization, culture, achievements, problems, meaning, and purpose). Some institutions approach integrative learning through a thematic model, such as the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay program in environmental studies, Pacific Lutheran University's emphasis on the "dynamics of change", and the College of the Atlantic's "human ecology" program. At Worcester Polytechnic Institute the students must select five thematically related humanities courses and, in the sixth course, conduct an independent study on the unifying theme of the other courses. The cluster approach also helps achieve integration of learning. Students enroll in two to four complementary courses during the same semester or term, sometimes with an integrative seminar as well. Such programs can be found at Dominican College of San Rafael, Clark University,

College of the Holy Cross, and Gustavus Adolphus College. At the latter institution, for example, the student might take the two literature courses "English Literature to 1789" and "Chaucer" paired, respectively, with two history courses, "English History" and "Medieval History". At times, it should be noted, cluster and thematic approaches are hardly distinguishable.

Values Model. Based on the notion that value clarification and formation are necessary for holistic living and responsible career pursuits, some colleges and universities orient their curricula toward an examination of personal and cultural (Western and non-Western) value dimensions. There are three major theoretical approaches to the teaching of values: (1) the values clarification approach (Raths, Harmin, and Simon, 1966); (2) the cognitive development approach to moral maturity (e.g., Piaget, Kohlberg); and (3) the personality/character development approach (e.g., William G. Perry, Robert Hogan). Probably no college or university operates an institution-wide values curriculum oriented exclusively to any one of these approaches; indeed, only a few have developed values curricula of any kind on a scale beyond a few courses or segment of the institution.

At Eckerd College the Values Sequence is taken by all students over a four-year period. During the first year the student explores Jewish and Christian heritages. The second year is given to an examination of a world culture other than the student's own. In the third year the focus is on the value dimensions of the student's academic concentration. Fourth year seminars deal

with the value aspects of application of learning, career choices, and the total college experience. Other colleges with an explicit values emphasis include St. Olaf College, Spring Arbor College, El Centro Community College, Marist College, Valencia Community College, Alverno College, and Warner Pacific University.

Student-based Models. Some colleges are moving away from "essentialistic" curricula based on specified bodies of indispensable knowledge, toward those with an "existential" emphasis on the exigencies and requirements of contemporary living. The reasons for this shift are (1) the concerns of today's students with personal identity and with contemporary issues which directly affect their own lives; (2) the increasing heterogeneity of student bodies; and (3) recent findings relative to how people learn and develop. Practices associated with student-centered curricula are programs of independent study, small-group settings (seminars, tutorials), peer-group teaching, experiential learning, student-devised curricula, contract-learning, "reflexive" study, and the adoption of less exalted roles by faculty.

At Brown University general education requirements have been dropped, being replaced with a heavy emphasis on advising and student-designed curricula. Contract-learning has replaced distributive core courses at New College at the University of South Florida. Peer-group tutoring is practiced at Brooklyn College. Duke University stresses small-group learning experiences, requiring lowerclassmen to complete one full semester course designated as a seminar, tutorial, or independent study,

or a combination of two preceptorials or discussion sections. In Kent State University's small-group "clusters of concern" program, faculty members function as a "teacher-guide and friend" rather than as a more formal lecturer. Other versions of student-centered curricula are found at New College of the University of Alabama, Austin College, and William James College.

Competency-based Models. According to Levine (1978), competency-based education "places emphasis on educational outcomes rather than the experiences that comprise a curriculum." Students are apprised in advance of the competencies they must achieve to complete the course of study, and alternate methods are provided to foster the achievement of designated outcomes. One of the first and perhaps the most noted competency-based program to be developed is that at Alverno College. Here students must develop proficiency in eight competencies to graduate. Each competency involves six levels of mastery, each one progressively more difficult to achieve. The largest college having a complete four-year competency-based program is Brigham Young University. Students there must achieve desired outcomes but are given the choice of taking regular courses which are geared to the desired competencies or of pursuing independent and self-directed study on their own. No specific courses are required, although most students do enroll in appropriate courses. Other competency-based programs are found at Mars Hill College, Sterling College, Justin Morrill College at Michigan State University, and Metropolitan State University.

A subtype of competency-based programs is ability-focus. Here the emphasis is upon designated outcomes but the methods of promoting ability development may not correspond precisely with CBE criteria. Nevertheless, the two are closely related. At Illinois Central College the DOORS program (Development of Operational Reasoning Skills) is a freshman core of six courses which serves as an alternate way of meeting general education requirements. Improvement of student reasoning abilities (observation, description, comparison and contrast, classification, inference, and cause and effect) is the objective of the program. At Loyola University in New Orleans the upper division of the Common Curriculum is divided into aesthetic studies, decisional studies, and speculative studies. The aims are to enhance the student's powers of aesthetic judgment, to develop the ability for making ethically-informed decisions, and to stimulate clear, imaginative, and reflective thinking. The objective of Bard College's Freshman Core program ("Languages of the Humanities") is to develop an understanding of and a facility with the several "languages" employed in the arts and sciences: verbal and written language, vocabulary, logic, cognitive pattern, metaphor, poetics, science, mathematics, invention, philosophy, design, art, music, social sciences, and other cultures.

Career-focus Models. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1977) advocates a closer linkage between education and the world of work during the college years. Many colleges and universities, however, have been reluctant to make

this commitment. Of the institutions which have sought to integrate academic study with the world of work, certain patterns have emerged. The well-known Center for Cooperative Education at Antioch College is integrally involved in teaching the interdisciplinary freshman core course. The Center fosters off-campus student employment not so much, perhaps, for the sake of career preparation as for the sake of experiential and affective learning. The less affluent students at Berea College, however, engage in work activities partly to support the college, partly in lieu of tuition payments, and certainly for the acquisition of job-entry skills. Through use of a year-long laboratory course on campus, the students are led to see the connections between theory and practice, between the classroom and the job. The aim of the lab course is to develop administrative and organizational competence. At LaGuardia Community College all freshmen must fulfill an "internship" in the community during one quarter, and sophomores for two quarters. These work experiences are supplemented with campus seminars related to career planning, work-oriented value questions, and management skills. The third seminar requires independent research on a work-related topic. Other colleges having curricula oriented toward work and careers are Northeastern University in Boston, University of Cincinnati, and Augustana College.

Each of the above curricular patterns has its unique hazards and promises. Each reflects the mission, student body, and needs of the institution. Each operates under the governance

of a curricular concept. Although no curricular program is fully transferable from one institution to another, the range of approaches here set forth should provide a number of fruitful suggestions for those curriculum committees involved in the reform of general education.

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